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AUTHOR Paratore, Jeanne R.

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ABSTRACT

A study examined the influence of an intergenerational approach on the literacy development of parents and on the practice of family literacy at home. During a 3-year period, 367 families enrolled in multilingual, multiability literacy classes for at least one instructional cycle. The adult basic education classes were held in a community center located within walking distance of three of the four elementary schools in an ethnically diverse, two-square-mile area considered a "gateway" for new immigrants. The adults were provided instruction in reading and responded to literacy materials of adult interest as well as a selection of books, strategies, and ideas for use with their children; they were also encouraged to share their children's stories and literacy events. Data included assessments of parents' fluency in reading English, attendance, attrition, and self-report data on parent/child literacy activities. Results indicated that: (1) attendance was consistent across learners and across instructional cycles; (2) demonstration and modeling led to routine practice of family literacy within a relatively brief period of time; (3) storybook reading emerged as a frequent behavior, while shared writing did not; (4) parents visited the local library only once a month; and (5) there was a high growth in literacy fluency among the lowest performing adults. Findings suggest that an intergenerational focus in multiability multilingual adult education classes may provide an important vehicle for promoting literacy learning of adults. (Two figures and one table of data are included; 27 references are attached.) (RS)

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Jeanne R. Paratore

Boston University

605 Commonwealth Avenue

Boston, MA 02215

(617) 353-3285

ED352614

An Intergenerational Approach to Literacy: Effects on the Literacy Learning of Adults and on the Practice of Family Literacy

RUNNING HEAD: AN INTERGENERATIONAL APPROACH

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AN INTERGENERATIONAL APPROACH TO LITERACY: EFFECTS ON THE LITERACY LEARNING OF ADULTS AND ON THE PRACTICE OF FAMILY LITERACY

Recent research supports a strong link between home environment and children's acquisition of school-based literacy. Specifically, home practices such as shared reading and reading aloud, making a variety of print materials available, and promoting positive attitudes toward literacy, have been found to have a significant impact on the acquisition of early literacy (Clark, 1984; Teale, 1984). In homes where literacy activities such as these are not practiced, young children are likely to receive less preparation for school-based literacy prior to entering school, and less support and assistance in correcting difficulties that may occur after they enter school.

As many researchers, most notably Heath (1983) and Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988) have pointed out, in some families, the types and forms of literacy practiced at home are largely incongruent with the types of literacy that children will encounter upon school entry. Therefore, despite the fact that literacy is far from absent in most home settings, the particular types of events that parents share with their children may have little influence on children's school success. Further, when parents lack ability, familiarity or confidence in that which is considered standard or school-based literacy, they may have limited opportunity and access to becoming active participants in any aspect of their children's schooling. The work of Lareau (1990), for example, revealed that upper-middle-class parents established far tighter linkages between home and school, contacting teachers to discuss grades, homework and placement, while working-class parents were found to lack both the skills and the confidence to intervene in these ways, and more frequently left such decision-making to the teacher. In contrast to researchers who suggest that social class is of only modest significance in shaping children's schooling, Lareau argues that social class shapes the resources parents have at their disposal to comply with teachers' requests for assistance. As suggested by Lareau, one of the

responsibilities of researchers is to do a better job of studying the ways in which families can "bring themselves into alignment with the standards of 'gatekeeping institutions'..."(p. 11).

Rather than focusing on what parents do or on what parents learn in literacy programs that involve parents, most investigations have examined outcomes related to children with little or no attention to the ways that programs and practices influenced parental behaviors. In a comprehensive review of studies designed to assess the importance of parent involvement, generally, rather than intergenerational literacy, specifically, White, Taylor & Moss (1992) report that the studies that are widely cited as the basis for the importance of parent intervention focus almost exclusively on programs in which the emphasis is on parents as intervenors in children's school learning, with virtually no attention to programs that may involve parents in other ways or to benefits that may accrue to parents or other family members. Further, virtually none of the studies reviewed attempted to monitor whether or not parents were, in fact, implementing the strategies and practices that were being taught. This later finding is of critical importance since these researchers conclude based on their reanalysis of major studies that there is little convincing evidence that parent intervention results in greater benefits for children. In investigations that have been specifically designed to assess the influence of family literacy, the focus has generally related to definition and programmatic description (e.g., Nuckolls, 1991; Ranard, 1989) or, again, to the academic performance of children with little attention to adults and their actions, behaviors or beliefs (e.g., Bean, et al., 1990; Seamon, Popp & Darling, 1991). The few studies that have investigated parents' views and understandings about literacy have found that they strongly influence their literacy interactions with children (e.g., Eldridge-Hunter, 1992; Goldenberg, Reese & Gallimore, 1992). More information is needed, however, to describe the kinds of instructional practices that ultimately lead to greater parental awareness and understanding of school-based literacy, routine and effective practice of shared literacy in the homes of adult new readers and writers and ways adults who possess non-standard or non-school-based literacy might become active participants in their children's schooling.

The investigation that is described in this article was planned to examine the influence of an intergenerational approach to literacy learning on the reading and writing development of parents and on the incidence of the practice of family literacy at home. It was based on the premise that an intergenerational approach to literacy would not only extend adults' own uses of literacy, but would also enhance the ways they support their children's school learning. It differs from related studies in that the outcome studied was not academic achievement of children, but rather the influence of the project on adults, themselves, and their resulting interactions with their children. Two questions were posed: (1) What is the impact of an intergenerational approach on the literacy development and use of adult learners enrolled in an adult basic education program and, (2) What is the impact of an intergenerational approach on the incidence of shared literacy events between parent and child?

METHODOLOGY

Setting and Participants

The community in which this project was implemented is small, comprising approximately 2 square miles and is considered a "gateway" for new immigrants. Families are ethnically diverse (47% Latino; 20% Southeast Asian; 10% other) and generally economically deprived, with the average income below $10,000. The high school reports a dropout rate that exceeds 50% and the highest teen pregnancy rate in the state. During the first year of this study, the School Committee entered into a 10-year-agreement with a private university to "manage" the school system. The project that served as the setting for this study was essentially the first major effort to emerge as a result of the school/university partnership.

Adult basic education classes in literacy were held in a community center located within walking distance of three of the four elementary schools, allowing parents to walk their children to school prior to coming to class. Free child care was provided for preschool-aged children. During the 3-year period, there were 367 families enrolled in literacy classes for at least one instructional cycle, including 246 mothers, 73 fathers, 27 grandparents, 10 aunts, 8 uncles, 1 sibling and 2 adults who were caretakers but did not have a defined relationship with children.

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Within the families, there were 816 children, 270 preschool-aged and 546 school-aged. Ethnicity included 232 Latino/Latina, 102 Southeast Asian, 19 Caucasian, 13 African-American families and 1 Arab family. Of the 367 adults, 351 spoke English as a second language. Families represented 28 different countries of origin and 13 different first languages. For second language learners, the range of English proficiency varied from limited to fair, and the range of literacy in the first language varied as well, from limited to high levels of proficiency. Five of the families reported reading aloud to their children in their first language prior to participation in the study.

There were two criteria for parents' enrollment in the classes: a desire to improve their own literacy and a commitment to engage in shared literacy events with their children on a daily basis.

Procedures

Parents attended literacy classes 4 days per week, 2 hours per day. During the first year, classes were organized within three instructional cycles of 9 weeks, 12 weeks and 13 weeks. During the second year and third years, two instructional cycles of 15 weeks each were held each year. The research on bilingual education, second language learning and multicultural education (Genesee, 1985; Nieto, 1992; Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Weinstein, 1984) led us to hypothesize that classes comprised of multicultural and multilingual learners would enrich the learning climate. Therefore, classes were deliberately formed to reflect the demographics of the community, with each class comprising approximately 70% Latino families, 20% Southeast Asian families, and 10 % other ethnic groups. In multiability, multilingual groups of 25 or fewer, adults were (a) provided instruction in reading and responding to literacy materials of adult interest, (b) provided a selection of books, strategies and ideas for use with their children and, (c) encouraged to share their children's stories and drawings and to discuss literacy events, and their importance, in their lives and the lives of their children. Emphasis was placed on family contexts for literacy use with specific emphasis on family storybook reading. In addition, parents were encouraged to join with their children in multiple uses of literacy.

including reading and writing oral histories, composing letters to friends and relatives aa well as notes to family members, journal keeping, story writing and publishing. Parents were also taught how to help children with homework, types of questions they might ask the classroom teacher to find out about their children's progress and how to ask questions of their children about the school day.

Instructional reading/writing strategies used with these adults have received support in the professional literature related to adult literacy education (Thistlethwaite, 1983) and included assisted reading and writing, paired rereadings, cooperative learning, and metacognitive training.

Attention was given not only to the acquisition of literacy skills and strategies, but also to developing individual skill in exploring the relationship of literacy, itself, to the learners and their families. To develop this skill, each day learners made an entry in a journal about a shared literacy event from the day before, and reflected in writing on how the event influenced themselves and their children.

Topics for reading and writing were deliberately chosen to stimulate a discussion of ethnicity and culture, as a way to "discover and explore ethnic connections" (Ferdman, 1990). Introduction to each literacy lesson was based in each learner's first language and culture by introducing key concepts or vocabulary in the first language or by asking learners to connect settings, situations or experiences in their reading to those in their countries of origin or their own cultures. This practice consistently led to a discussion of multiple perspectives on a particular idea or concept which served as a bridge to the reading of the text in English. Emphasis on building an awareness that print literacy was largely dependent on each learner's background and experiences was central to each lesson.

Data Sources

Several measures were employed to collect evidence of the impact of the program on parents' literacy acquisition and on the incidence of shared literacy events in the home setting. Measures included the following:

Reading Fluency. Within 2 weeks of entry to the project and again following 40 instructional hours, parents completed an assessment of their fluency in reading in English. The instructional cycle of 40 hours was selected on the basis of data that indicate that adults require between 50-100 instructional hours to make significant gains in reading (Mikulecky, 1990). Since this project was designed to promote high attendance and relatively intensive practice through shared literacy practice at home, it was hypothesized that measurable gains would be made in a shorter time period. Parents chose an assessment passage in English from a representative sample of materials adults encounter on a daily basis. Included for selection were current newspaper articles of local and national interest, legal papers, short stories, nonfiction selections and children's picture books. The chosen selection was used for pre and postassessment. A running record of each adult's oral reading behaviors, performed following a silent reading of text, was completed. During pretesting, if the adult indicated that the task was too difficult to attempt, interventions were provided to decrease the level of difficulty. Interventions included previewing the passage before reading by discussing the topic in the first language (L1), a read-aloud by the examiner followed by discussion in L1 to familiarize the learner with the passage topic and ideas, and/or assistance with specific words or phrases during reading. No interventions were used during posttesting.

Data have been collected and analyzed on a sample of 9 parents who were identified as having minimal literacy proficiency in both their first language (L1) and their second language (L2). Subjects selected for study were those whose pretest performance on the running record exceeded an error rate of 10% and could therefore be considered to have entered the project with low print literacy in English. It was hypothesized that these lowest performing learners were likely to be the hardest to teach in the multilingual, multiability setting and thus would provide a valid measure of project effectiveness. Of the 9 subjects in the sample, 6 were Latino; 2 were Asian and 1 was Portuguese. Years of schooling in their own countries ranged from 4 to 12 years, with an average of 7 years.

Attendance. Daily attendance rates were recorded. The mean attendance rate for project participants for each cycle was compared to the average attendance rate for adults in basic education programs serving parents in a nonintergenerational model in the same community. These data are available for all 367 adults participating in the project.

Attrition . The number of participants who enrolled and completed at least one full instructional cycle was calculated and compared to national averages for program completion of adults in basic education programs. These data are available for all 367 adults participating in the project.

Parent/Child Literacy . Self-report data on the incidence of parent/child literacy activities in the home setting were collected on a weekly basis. Data collected included: number of selections read to the child by the parent; number of selections read to the parent by the child; number of times joint writing activities occurred; number of visits to the library; number of books borrowed or bought; number of times games were played involving words or reading; number of meetings held with the child's teacher; and number of times parents assisted the child in completing homework. Self-report data were analyzed and compared at the end of each instructional cycle, with a focus on the degree to which the incidence of literacy events suggested the existence of a routine or consistency in the utilization of literacy at home. Self-report data have been collected from a sample of 10 families.

RESULTS

Results are reported in relation to the impact of the program on parents' literacy learning and on the incidence of parent/child literacy events in the home setting.

Parents' literacy learning

The impact of the intergenerational approach on parents' literacy learning was evaluated on the basis of three behaviors: attendance on a daily basis, completion of at least one instructional cycle, and reading proficiency as measured by a running record. The average attendance rate was 74%. This contrasts with an average attendance rate of approximately 50% in adult education programs nationally (Sticht, 1988-89), and an average attendance rate

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of 32% for adults in a traditional adult basic education program in the same community. It should be noted that in addition to the intergenerational versus nonintergenerational focus of the two programs, they also differ in grouping plans (multiability and multilingual in the focal program versus homogeneous and monolingual in the local program) and instructional strategies (strategy-based in the focal program versus skill-based in the local program).

With regard to retention, during the first year, 72% of all learners who remained in the program for at least two weeks completed at least one full 15-week cycle; during the second year, 93% of all learners who remained in the program for at least 2 weeks completed at least one full 15-week cycle. During the third year, 92% of all learners who remained in the program for 2 weeks completed at least one 15-week cycle. The average retention rate over the 3-year study was 85%. Of those who discontinued, reasons for leaving the program included employment, relocation to a new community, serious illness and pregnancy. In addition, 47% of all learners who completed one cycle enrolled in at least one more cycle. A review of attrition rates reported for other programs reveals approximately 50% as the most frequently reported statistic (Sticht, 1988-89). Using the local adult basic education program as the comparison group, the attrition rate for the same academic years was 57%. In making these comparisons, however, it is important to note that the short-term length of each cycle (9-15 weeks) may differ from the instructional periods for which the comparison data are based.

To assess the impact of the program on reading performance, oral reading proficiency of nine adults was examined. Percentages of oral reading miscues observed during pre and posttesting are reported in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

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An analysis of the pre and posttesting reading performances reveals an average decrease in oral reading miscues of 13% after 40 instructional hours. Using Clay's (1979) criteria, 6 of the 9 subjects shifted their performance on the tested passage from "difficult" to "learning." One learner shifted her performance from "difficult" to "easy." Since the pretest performance was accompanied by assistance from the examiner as appropriate and the posttesting performance was unassisted, the rate of growth was actually more substantial than the change in percentage indicates.

The Practice of Family Literacy

An analyses of family literacy behaviors are based on weekly self-report data submitted by 10 families during one instructional cycle. None of the families in the sample reported that they had engaged in shared literacy activities with their children prior to enrollment in this project.

The change in family literacy behaviors was measured by the number of literacy events reported during the first and last week of the instructional cycle. Data presented in Figure 2 suggest some significant changes. By the last week in the project, families reported reading to children three to four times each week, though writing still occurred infrequently. Increased emphasis was placed on asking about homework and in providing children help in completing it. In addition, most families had visited the library at least once during the last week of the instructional cycle, as compared to no visits by any of the families during the first week of the project.

Place Figure 2 about here

In addition to assessing the general increase in the practice of literacy from the first to the last week, data were also analyzed to assess the influence of the project on the routine practice of family literacy. For this analysis, the average incidence of literacy events per family per week was computed during the last eight weeks of the instructional cycle. The data indicate that

families were engaged in shared storybook reading three to four times per week and interacted with school-aged children regarding homework and general school activities almost daily (4.17 times per week). However, writing occurred in the home setting relatively infrequently (1.05 times per week) and visits to the library occurred only about once each month (.38 times per week) for most of the families.

An examination of the weekly self-reports of one family reveals a typical family profile. As shown in Table 2, Marta, whose two children were ages 5 and 7 at the time of her participation, read to and with her children several times each week, asked or helped with homework daily, and frequently talked about school and reading. In addition, they frequently viewed television together and discussed the program they viewed, emphasizing visual and oral literacy as well as print literacy. However, Marta never reported writing a note or message to her children, and began to visit the library only in the eleventh week of the project, after her teachers had begun to place more emphasis on this literacy event.

Place Table 1 about here

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study suggest some promising directions for the integration of intergenerational literacy efforts with adult education programs. First, the consistency of the attendance rates across learners and across instructional cycles suggests that the intergenerational approach combined with effective practices in the teaching of literacy supports high and long-term attendance. The importance of this finding can be assessed in relation to evidence of the number of instructional and practice hours which correlate with achievement gain by adults in reading. As noted previously, evidence suggests that it takes 50 to 100 hours for an adult to achieve one year's growth in literacy, resulting in the need for several hundred hours for a beginning reader to master reading the newspaper. Consequently, it is reported that only 10% to 15% of adults in current literacy programs ever reach this level (Diekhoff,

1988). It would seem, therefore, that if adult new readers are to make both substantial and rapid progress in learning to read and write, instructional opportunities must be both intensive and frequent. In this study, two practices seem to address this need. First, by offering 8 hours of instruction each week, adults received a relatively heavy dose of instructional time. Second, by encouraging and monitoring the routine practice of family literacy, opportunities for utilization and practice were high and likely contributed to the rapid gains in proficiency. Since the design of this study did not include an analysis of the effects of instructional strategies versus literacy practice through parent/child events, it can only be concluded that the combination of effective instruction with family literacy practice promotes rapid gains for adult learners.

Self-report data indicate steady and systematic practice of shared literacy in the home setting. These data hold important implications for both the child and parent. As noted above, such events provide the parent increased opportunities for practice in natural and meaningful settings, thus promoting more rapid growth in literacy. As well, existing evidence (e.g., Clark,1984; Durkin,1978; Teale, 1984) indicates that such events serve to prepare young children for successful acquisition of early literacy, and to promote continued success for school-aged learners (Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hemphill, 1991). In reviewing the self-report data, several findings are important. First, the relatively rapid acquisition of a range of shared literacy behaviors is consistent with data reported by Fitzgerald, Spiegel & Cunningham (1991) that indicate that both high and low-literacy parents are positive about home literacy practices and need not be persuaded of their importance; rather, these researchers suggested that low-literacy parents need to be shown how they might serve as role models. In the present study, demonstration and modeling led to routine practice of family literacy within a relatively brief period of time. Second, the finding that storybook reading emerged as a frequent behavior while shared writing did not is also consistent with Fitzgerald, Spiegel & Cunningham's finding that parents tended to characterize early literacy development mainly with regard to reading and to the exclusion of writing. Despite a fair amount of emphasis on shared writing

(e.g., examples of the kinds of notes parents and children might compose to each other; discussions of parent/child dialogue journals; the recording of family histories) few families reported that shared writing occurred regularly. Third, the finding that parents visited the local library only once per month reveals what may well be a flaw in the project's design. Since parents routinely borrowed books from the lending library available through their literacy classes, it may be that they did not have a need to obtain additional reading materials. However, since using the local library is one way to establish a resource for life-long support of literacy, the need to develop and promote a library "habit" is an important one that the design of the project did not, apparently, promote effectively.

Finally, it is important to note that several of the practices used in this project are unusual in adult education. Adult education programs generally group learners on the basis of literacy performance and on the basis on language proficiency. This project drew from the professional literature in elementary and secondary education that questions the efficacy of ability grouping practices (e.g., Kulik & Kulik, 1982; Oakes, 1985) and on evidence that suggests that second language learners may learn effectively from "indirect" immersion (Genesee, 1987). Adults were therefore placed in classes that were heterogeneous with regard to both literacy and language proficiency. The high rate of growth in literacy fluency among the lowest performing learners suggests that grouping in this way, at the very least, did not diminish learning. A controlled study may reveal that it promotes learning. Further, unlike many literacy programs for adult beginning readers, this project did not use controlled vocabulary materials for instruction. Rather, adults were provided materials typically found in their home and community settings. Level of difficulty was mediated through different types of interventions (i.e., prereading discussion and vocabulary development; discussion in L1 before reading in English; discussion in L1 after reading in English; read-alouds followed by echo or choral readings). Again, the rate of growth in reading fluency suggests that differentiating instruction in these ways resulted in successful literacy learning.

CONCLUSION

Findings suggest that an intergenerational focus in adult education classes may provide an important vehicle for promoting literacy learning of adults, particularly those who are new readers and writers, and through them, more opportunities to share literacy with children. Further research is needed to assess the impact of the approach on larger numbers of adults across a wide range of literacy and language proficiency levels. As well, longitudinal evidence of the impact of the program on the academic success of children is necessary.

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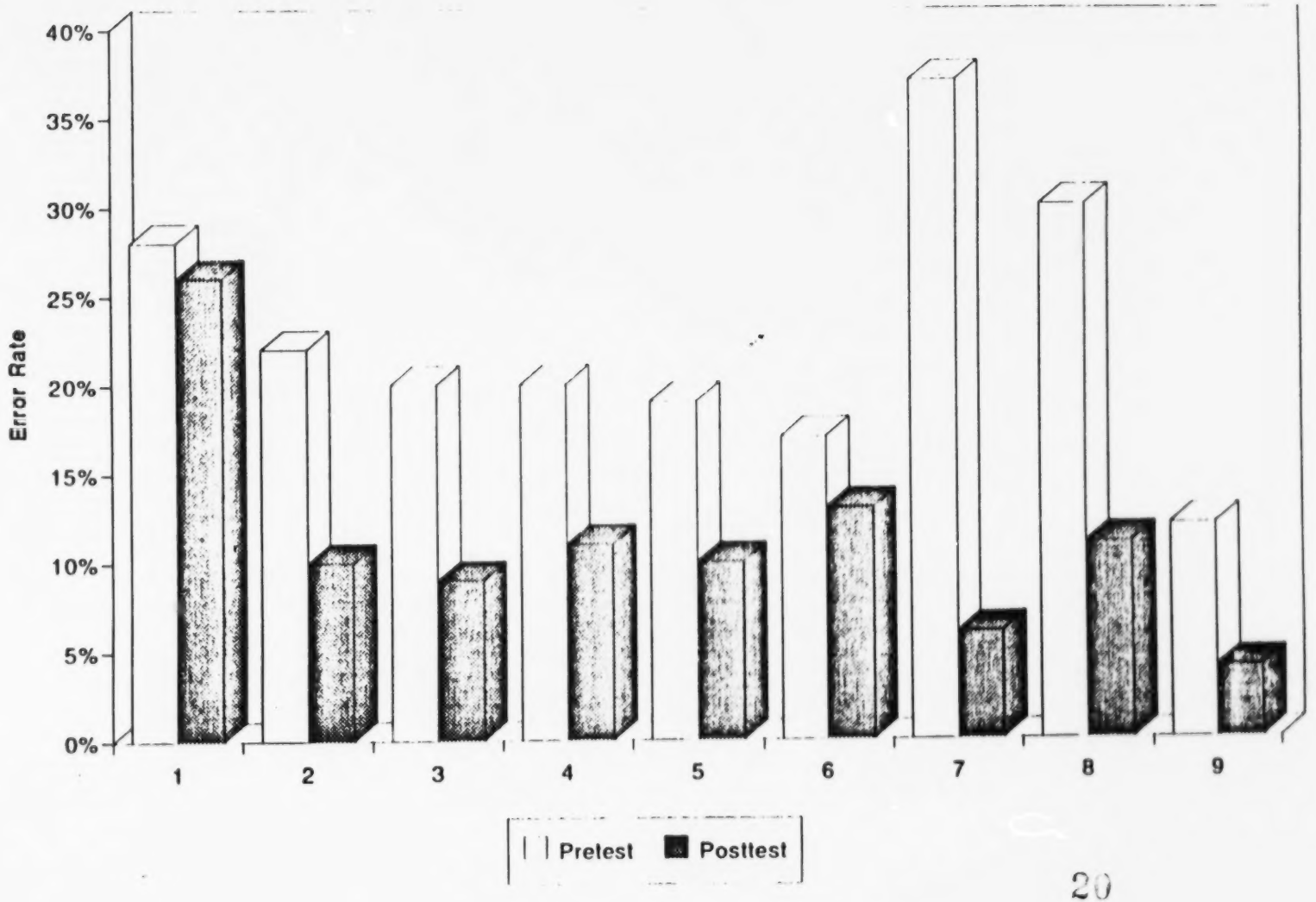
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Change in oral reading miscues for each subject following 40 instructional hours.

Figure 2. Change in the incidence of shared literacy between parents and children.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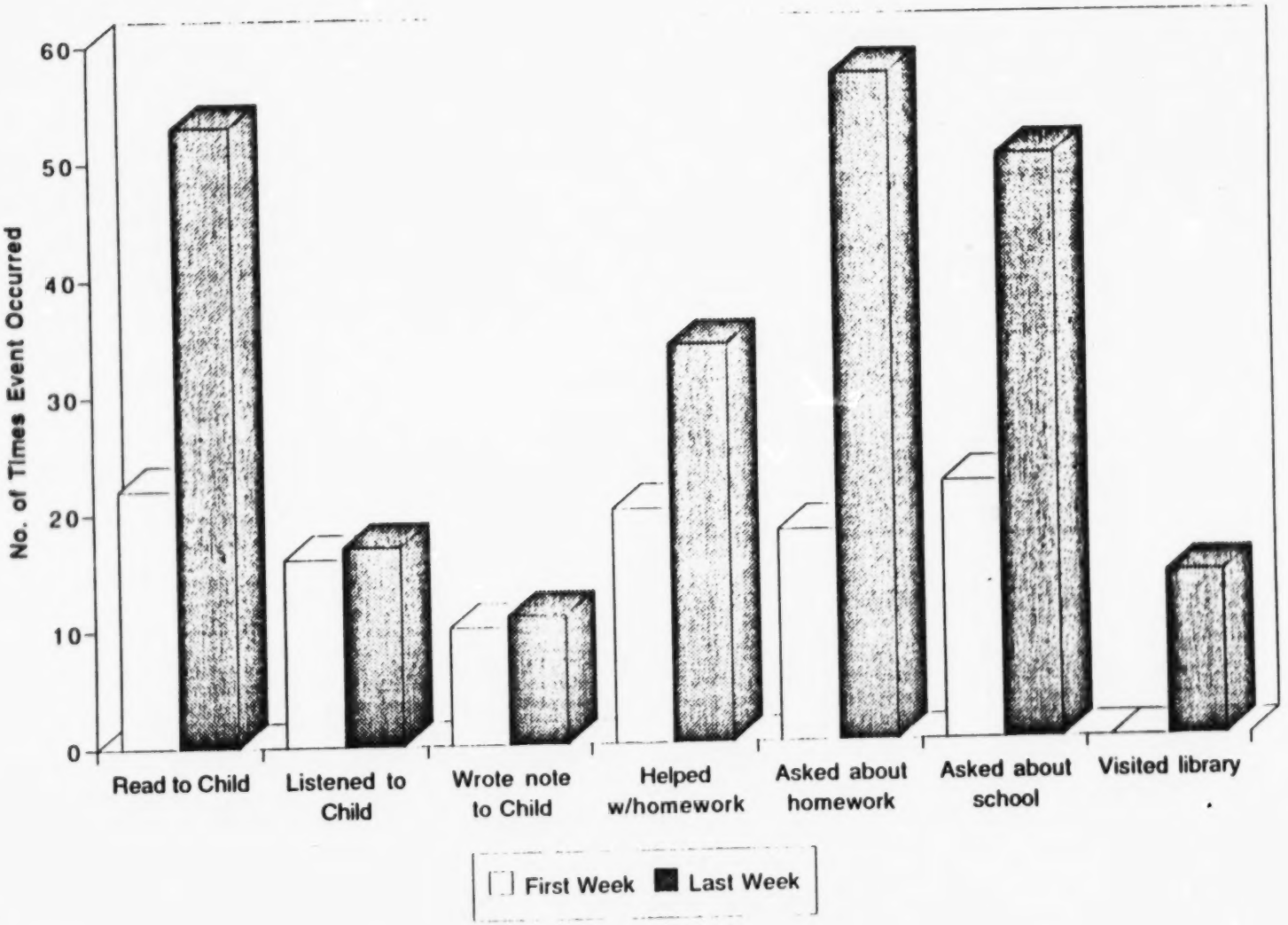
No. of Times Event Occurred
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Read to Child
Listened to Child
Wrote note to Child
Helped w/homework
Asked about homework
Asked about school
Visited library
First Week
Last Week

Table 1

Parent/Child Weekly Activities - Marta

	WEEK														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Read to child	4	4	6	6	1	5	3	5	3	0	6	3	4	3	8
Listened to child read	3	5	7	6	0	2	2	2	1	3	4	2	1	3	4
Helped with homework	5	5	5	6	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Asked about homework	5	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Wrote note or message to child	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Helped child write a letter or greeting card	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Played a game with child involving words	0	0	4	2	0	0	3	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
Viewed television together	5	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	2	4	7
Discussed program viewed	0	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	4	4
Asked child questions about school or reading	0	0	2	2	1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Visited a library	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2
Borrowed or bought a book	3	2	4	5	1	11	2	5	3	0	6	3	4	5	7